

PACKS in this midsize range are extremely versatile. They're big enough for short one- or two-night three-season backpacking trips (and longer for those with compact gear or very neat packing methods) and for hut-to-hut or hotel-to-hotel walks; a good size for winter hillwalking and okay for summer day walks when cinched down.

Designed for heavier loads than daysacks, 40- to 50-litre packs usually have padded hipbelts and internal frames or framesheets. Some have identical back systems to much bigger packs and can handle loads of 15kg and more, if you can fit it all in. I don't think such systems are really necessary on packs this size and they add weight and complexity. A popular system designed to reduce dampness on your back is the sprung frame, which curves away from your back, leaving an air gap. Usually there is a mesh panel in contact with the back though some makers have dispensed with this. While this system can mean a drier back it does hold the load further away from you, which can be less stable and more uncomfortable, especially when scrambling and on rough terrain. The best of these designs carry well but overall I prefer a closer-fitting back system. Sophisticated back systems like these need to fit properly so many come in several back lengths or else have harnesses that can be adjusted.

The lightest pack reviewed weighs 1.05kg; three weigh less than 1.2kg; seven less than 1.5kg. Two however weigh 1.75kg. Unless you need extra durability I don't see any need for a 40-litre pack to weigh more than 1.2kg or a 50-litre one more than 1.4kg, given that the heavier of the two 72-litre packs I used on the Pacific Northwest Trail last summer only weighed 1.4kg.

**Test Notes:** All the packs were loaded with the same gear to judge comparative volumes. Manufacturers' weight is listed first, followed by TGO weight.



## LIGHTWAVE

Fastpack 50  
£99



### TECHNICAL SPEC

**Capacity:** 50 litres  
**Materials:** 420D Dynatech/300D micro-ripstop polyester  
**Closures:** lid with twin buckles  
**Compartments:** 1  
**Back:** padded, twin stays  
**Sizes:** 1  
**Hipbelt:** padded, stiffened  
**Pockets:** 1 external lid, 2 stretch side, internal hydration  
**Features:** taped & welded seams, twin ice axe/trekking pole loops, side compression straps  
**Manufacturers' weight/TGO weight:** 1.1kg/1.12kg  
**Volume to weight ratio:** 22.3 litres per 500 grams  
**Likes:** weight, cost, durability, sealed seams  
**Dislikes:** nothing

THREE years ago when I last reviewed packs this size I gave the Fastpack 50 Best Buy. None of the new packs has changed my mind. It is a tough, light, comfortable pack that does everything I expect from a backpack this size. It has the best volume to weight ratio of all the packs tested yet is made of more durable fabric than many of them. It's also virtually waterproof without the need of a cover or a liner as all the seams are sealed except for those attaching the back panel, which are partly protected by your back. I've not had any leakage in rain. The pre-curved rigid frame supports the load well and helps transfer it to the hipbelt. There aren't many features but all are functional. And it's less expensive than most packs this size.

DMM International  
01286 873 520  
www.lightwave.uk.com



## OMM

Villain  
£130



### TECHNICAL SPEC

**Capacity:** 45+10 litres  
**Materials:** Dyneema  
**Closures:** lid with single buckle  
**Compartments:** 1  
**Back:** framesheet with internal frame  
**Sizes:** 1  
**Hipbelt:** padded  
**Pockets:** 1 external lid, 1 zipped front, 2 side pocket, 2 mesh wand, internal hydration, internal side  
**Features:** front compression/storage panel, zipped side access, twin ice axe loops, ski loops, lid lash loops  
**Weight:** 1.16kg/1.16kg  
**Volume to weight ratio:** 19.4 litres per 500 grams  
**Likes:** light weight, durable fabric, pockets, front panel  
**Dislikes:** quite expensive, small lid

THE Villain is an excellent pack if you prefer plenty of features rather than a minimalist design. It is made from tough, light Dyneema fabric and has a supportive back system and hipbelt that handles 12kg comfortably. The front panel is useful for carrying everything from a snow shovel to wet clothing. I also like the side zip access as this can be used to extract waterproofs without having to open the pack fully. The side pockets will hold litre bottles. The lid is the only slight weak point as it's not quite big enough to cover the top when the pack is crammed full. Three years ago the Villain was equal Best Buy with the Fastpack but then it only cost £4 more. Now at £31 more it's not as good value.

OMM  
01524 822084  
www.theomm.com



## GOLITE

Pursuit  
£115



### TECHNICAL SPEC

**Capacity:** 51 litres  
**Materials:** recycled 210D nylon, recycled 210D ripstop nylon  
**Closures:** detachable lid with twin buckles  
**Compartments:** 1  
**Back:** padded, framesheet, 2 stays  
**Sizes:** 2  
**Hipbelt:** padded  
**Pockets:** 1 external lid, 2 front, 2 wand, 2 hipbelt, internal hydration  
**Features:** twin ice axe straps, twin side/front straps, base compression hooks & loops, lid lash points  
**Weight:** 1.33kg/1.33kg  
**Volume to weight ratio:** 19.2 litres per 500 grams  
**Likes:** lightweight, comfortable, pockets, recycled fabric  
**Dislikes:** nothing

AT 51 litres the Pursuit is slightly bigger than most of the packs tested. GoLite's litres are quite generous compared with some makers too so this is a roomy pack, ideal for short backpacking trips. It's very comfortable with loads up to 15kg, having a solid curved frame and a thick padded hipbelt. The rear pocket is huge, which is excellent for light items like clothing. Put heavy stuff in it and you can feel the weight pulling back. The recycled fabric is tough and should last well. The side straps can also be used across the front of the pack for carrying wide items or compressing the load. There are hooks and loops on the base too, for reducing the volume.

GoLite  
0800 917 5642  
www.golite.com